

“Female Issue”. Polemics about Working Women in the Kingdom of Poland in the Period after the Suppression of the January Uprising (1864) and the Outbreak of the Great War (1914)

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Women's right to work or, more widely, challenging the established social role of women was not a brand-new topic in the Kingdom of Poland during the 1860s. It had been discussed before on the public forum. However, after the fiasco of the January Uprising (1864), those issues were vigorously discussed in press polemics. It mostly emerged due to altered social and economic conditions. On the one hand, the Polish community learned about the development of the women emancipation movement in Western Europe and the United States, on the other hand, much of the gentry went bankrupt being unable to bear the post-Uprising repressions. Many women from that milieu had to face the necessity of earning their living. That issue was addressed in the press at the time and, considering the frequency of such publications and their tenor, it must have sparked many emotions. This article discusses solutions proposed by both those who supported progress and attempted to add new occupations to the women's labour market and to help women with reformed education, and by defenders of traditional values. The latter protested the very idea of women working out of home as an affront to that gender's calling – being a wife and a mother. They were not only concerned that work might prejudice women's ability to take care of home or children, but the fact of eroding the traditional social order in which men were destined to the public sphere while women should reduce their ambitions to the private, domestic sphere. Accordingly, in the second half of the 19th century, we can perceive that the Polish press of that time tended to add more value to work done by women at home. Attempts were made to present it as a mission, not only on the home but also the social front. They tried to turn it into a science by proposing a new branch of science called the “national economy of women”. Another argument raised by those against the emancipation of women was the inherent “nature” of women who were allegedly predisposed to those tasks that are related to the role of wife, mother, housekeeper, to the exclusion of everything else.

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There was also a “compromise” option that if some women are forced to work because of unhappy wheels of fortune, they should choose jobs that would benefit from female characteristics such as compassion and taking care of details. However, the emotional nature, so typical of women, allegedly affected their view of the world and prevented them from working in such fields where objectivity was essential (medicine, law).

[Women; Poland; 19th Century; Right to Work; Emancipation]

Women’s right to work or, more widely, challenging the established social role of women was not a brand-new topic in the Kingdom of Poland during the 1860s; nor it was addressed for the first time by the public opinion or had never been discussed before on the public forum.¹ However, after the suppression of the January Uprising, those issues became the subject of vigorous publicist polemics. It was mostly caused by the changed social and economic conditions. On the one hand, the Polish society learned about the development of the women emancipation movement in Western Europe and United States; on the other hand, many gentlewomen had to face the necessity of earning their living. That latter circumstance was largely affected by the fact that much of the gentry went bankrupt being unable to bear the post-Uprising repressions (contributions, seizures of property) or to convert serfdom into another economic model that was necessary after the enfranchisement of peasants during that very period. In that difficult situation for Poles, not only in economic but also political and mental terms, after suppression of the Uprising, the ideological movement called positivism attracted more and more followers; positivism advocated that Poland should be restored from ruins, however not by fighting for freedom with occupying powers (Russia, Prussia, Austro-Hungarian Empire) what had proved to be useless but by working on the society to improve its “quality”. The promoters of positivism advocated work, education and technical progress. They believed it to be the way to solve almost all problems suffered by the Polish society of that time.²

¹ In order to narrow down the scope, this analysis is limited to the issue of work by women from the intelligentsia and gentry. In order to emphasize changes in the society’s attitude towards that issue, this text compares the situation in the second half of the 19th century with the prior period, namely the first half of the 19th century.

² P. WANDYCZ, *The Lands of Partition Poland 1795–1918*, Seattle 1974.

The positivism advertised work as the only right and moral way of living and combated all forms of idleness. Their criticism also extended over the women's style of living. Positivists believed that most high society ladies have never done anything productive or useful.³ That polemic was easily won by the positivism as nobody defended the women's right to be lazy. Maria Ilnicka, longstanding editor-in-chief of *Bluszcz* – the most important magazine for women in the Kingdom of Poland (1865–1918), who considered her own views as moderately conservative and never supported any radical changes in the women's role in the society, believed that living without work was immoral and represented a pointless vegetation both in case of men and women.⁴ Positivist literature contrasted the characters of hard working heroines who attempted to protect family estate from falling into stranger's (or rather foreigner's) hands thanks to their reasonable management, with the "old type" of women who were empty, hysterical, read worthless romance stories and spent hours idly sitting in their boudoirs.

Pen and paper were the main weapons used by the positivism as the battle for a new and better society was fought in the press and books. The issue of working women held an important place in journalist writings on social and society matters that were remarkably ample during the second half of the 19th century. Considering the frequency of such publications and their tenor, that topic must have sparked many emotions. The majority of (both male and female) press and literary writers who presented their views in the Polish press during the second half of the 19th century and at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, believed that they lived in times of great changes when the old order was being replaced with new values. The advocates of progress mostly rejoiced such developments. The defenders of traditional values protested the very idea of women working outside home as an affront to that gender's calling – being a wife and mother. However, they were not only concerned about how work might hinder women's ability to take care of home, children or husband – after all, high society

³ A. SZWARC, Krytyka kobiecości czy próżniaczego stylu życia? Stare i nowe wzorce życia codziennego kobiet w publicystyce i literaturze pięknej epoki pozytywizmu, in: A. ŻARNOWSKA – A. SZWARC (eds.), *Kobieta i kultura życia codziennego. Wiek XIX i XX, Zbiór studiów*, Warszawa 1997, pp. 295–307.

⁴ M. ILNICKA, Praca kobiety, in: *Bluszcz*, 17, 1894, p. 48.

women had servants, nursemaids and governesses. Any productive work by women eroded the traditional order of the universe in which men were destined for the public sphere while women should reduce their ambitions to the private, domestic sphere. In the traditional social order, women could feel appreciated as beings of supreme morality and more spiritual than men. Naturally, those qualities were only attributed to those with spotless reputation. Their task was to improve the other sex⁵ but they were only able to do it when their activities were limited to the family circle thus protecting them from the vulgarities of life. Being out of home unsupervised by her family or chaperon was seen by conservatives as a grave threat to female morality. *"Once married, she does not belong to herself – she is the queen and slave of the home hearth. The sanctity of women cannot be reconciled with duties and liberties of this world. To emancipate women, means ruining them."*⁶ That viewpoint was quite attractive for many women who remained unrelenting opponents of emancipating women. The latter were suspected of a desire to introduce equality that would strip women of their moral supremacy and, consequently, the respect of men and their chivalrous behaviour. Moreover, a considerable population of Polish women declared their belief in traditional roles.⁷

Still, many Poles desired to go beyond the narrow circle of household and family obligations. Writing books offered such an opportunity that was eagerly taken already in the first half of the 19th century by Jadwiga Łuszczewska, Klementyna nee Tańska Hoffmanowa, Paulina Wilkońska, and others. Still, they hastened to assure everybody that, in spite of having a successful career in literature, the women's duties and tasks remained their priority – the writing of books, articles etc. was an addition only.

In the first half of the 19th century, sewing and other needlework were the ideal occupation for high society women as they allegedly developed patience and sweetness of character. In the second half of the 19th century, positivists mercilessly derided that evidence of women's hard work as being of no practical use for anyone other than a profes-

⁵ GENIUSZ RODZINY, Podarunek Luizy Otto dla dziewic i niewiast, in: *Kłosy*, 264, 1870, p. 42.

⁶ H. DE BALZAC, *Kobieta trzydziestoletnia*, Września 1998, p. 99.

⁷ M. GLÜCKSBERG, Słowo o emancypacji kobiety w kraju naszym, in: *Kłosy*, 1868, p. 11.

sional seamstress (they called it "busy idleness")⁸ and led women to the kitchen and accounts. The model of new woman promoted by positivists was not an emancipating woman boldly crossing over to areas that used to be reserved for men, but a practical, sensible and thrifty mistress of the house who is not ashamed to step out of the parlour into the kitchen. In the second half of the 19th century, the Polish press suddenly started to add more value to work done by women at home. It was partially caused by the desire, so often manifested by positivist, to prove that doing household chores was also a job for a lady. The defence and glorification of "home hearth" seemed equally important for the supporters of traditional values faced with the growing force of emancipation that proposed alternative and attractive social functions for women. They emphasized that the role of a mistress of the house, wife and mother was the proper vocation for women. Attempts were made to increase the importance of that role by turning it into a mission – not only in a family but also as a social mission.⁹ Good – or frugal – assiduous and prudent household management was the basis of family welfare and allegedly was to be of great importance for the whole society, the national cause (it was impossible to say it directly because of censorship) and even the global economy. The role of a mistress of the house also had a moral dimension: mistress of the house should watch over the purity of morals in her subordinates (servants) and impart the values embodied by the "enlightened class" to lower classes, including patriotism.¹⁰ They further tried to add more value to household duties by turning it into a science, so typical in the second half of the 19th century, by proposing a new branch of science called the "national economy of women".¹¹ Therefore, the obligations that women had to their "home hearth" seemed uncontested. Even in *Bluszcz* that consistently supported the work of women, its female readers were warned not to neglect their priority, namely running their households.¹² Even emancipating women did not fight the

⁸ D. RZEPNIEWSKA, Ziemiańki w mieście. Królestwo Polskie w końcu XIX wieku, in: A. ŻARNOWSKA – A. SZWARC (eds.), *Kobieta i kultura życia codziennego. Wiek XIX i XX, Zbiór studiów*, Warszawa 1997, pp. 51–52.

⁹ E. G., Listy o urządzeniu domu, in: *Przegląd Tygodniowy*, 1, 1891, p. 11.

¹⁰ *Bluszcz*, 6, 1871, 27 stycznia (8 lutego).

¹¹ Kobieta na polu ekonomii politycznej, in: *Bluszcz*, 1875, p. 270.

¹² Kronika naukowego, artystycznego i społecznego ruchu kobiet, in: *Bluszcz*, 3, 1875,

dogma that household chores were the women's sole domain as they believed that the problem (reconciling work outside home with household duties) would be resolved thanks to mechanisation and modern technical inventions, and the use of services of specialist businesses that would certainly emerge in the future and take over certain chores done by housewives.¹³

The positivist ideology paired with economic factors played a large role, not only in glorifying of housewifely virtues of hard work and practical sense in women but also in changing the society's attitude towards gainful employment of women outside home. Positivists supported the preparations (by means relevant education) to do a specified job in case a given female failed to get married and/or had to earn her living alone. They were opposed by defenders of traditional values who feared the competition that could emerge because of women's working to both family obligations and the position of men in the society. Their another argument was the inherent "nature" of women who were allegedly predisposed to certain specific tasks and excluded from others. In the conservative view, the existing role of female sex was rooted in their very nature and, for that reason, any change would be damaging to both the society and to those concerned.¹⁴ The argument of it being "natural" or "unnatural" surfaces very often in discussions or polemics during those times. It was eagerly used, alongside references to the order set up by God, by supporters of the traditional status quo.¹⁵ *"She is instinctive – he is powerful; she has feelings and a heart – a man relies on reason, thought"*¹⁶ – that viewpoint was widely spread in the 19th century. It was not only believed by publicists – men but also by women.¹⁷ The domination of emotions over mental qualities allegedly determined both strengths and weaknesses of the female sex, both female virtues and defects. Eleonora Ziemięcka argued that

p. 23.

¹³ P. KUCZAŁSKA-REINSCHMIT, E pur si muove, in: *Przegląd Tygodniowy*, 31, 1893, p. 342.

¹⁴ L. NATANSON, Urywki w kwestii wychowania, in: *Gazeta Polska*, 119, 1861, p. 3.

¹⁵ A. NOWOSIELSKI, O przeznaczeniu i zawodzie kobiety, in: *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, 166, 1862, p. 217.

¹⁶ Z. SUDOLSKI (ed.), *Świadek epoki. Listy Elizy z Branickich Krasińskiej*, T. 2, Warszawa 1996, p. 104.

¹⁷ F. M., Z notatek pesymistki, in: *Kłosy*, 1046, 1885, p. 37; E. ZIEMIĘCKA, *Mysli o wychowaniu kobiet*, Warszawa 1843, p. 15.

women would grasp the meaning of metaphysical truths more easily than men but, unlike men, it was more difficult for them to be creative as governed by reason.¹⁸ In the second half of the 19th century, the Polish public opinion continued to attribute intellect and the exclusive ability to create abstract notions to men only. Women were left with sensitivity and romantic "genius of the heart" which, however, undermined their position in the times when science and reason were revered. From that point of view, women were unable to work with their mind. Emancipating women refuse to accept that and *Bluszcz*, headed by Maria Ilnicka, attempted a reconciliation of both. It has postulated that the tradition-sanctioned mission of a woman is to fulfil the duties of wife and mother, however, if a woman is forced to work because of unhappy turn of events, she has the right to work but should choose jobs that would benefit from female attributes.¹⁹ The emotional nature, so typical of women, allegedly affected their grasp of the world and prevented them from working in such fields where exact cold objectivity was essential.²⁰ It mainly referred to medicine and law since professional aspiration of women in those areas raised the strongest objections among the conservatives.²¹ The natural attributes of the female sex were allegedly given to women because of their key mission in life – motherhood. For that very reason, a woman is caring and easily handles children.²² As women were attributed certain teaching abilities, their working as teachers was a longstanding tradition enjoying the widest social acceptance. However, it should be primary teaching or teaching in schools for girls only.²³ Another longstanding tradition was the literary activity of women. In the second half of the 19th century, female writers were generally recognised in the Kingdom of Poland thanks to such pioneers as Klementyna nee Tańska Hoffmanowa or Narcyza Żmichowska. It is notable that both writers were interested in teaching. The social opinion was mostly well-disposed towards female writers of books for children and teenagers as such writers happily combined their literary talents with the

¹⁸ ZIEMIĘCKA, p. 15.

¹⁹ Kobieta na polu ekonomii politycznej, in: *Bluszcz*, 1875, p. 270.

²⁰ Korespondencya zagraniczna, in: *Bluszcz*, 1, 1878, pp. 4–5.

²¹ NOWOSIELSKI, p. 217.

²² Korespondencya zagraniczna, in: *Bluszcz*, 1, 1878, p. 5.

²³ Ibidem, p. 4.

“natural” educational inclinations of women. That so-called small literature was not seen as an artistic activity but as a continuation of teaching efforts.

Artistic talents were not denied to women, however, as far as fine arts are concerned, their talents were allegedly “small talents” used to kill time and to beautify the surroundings, building on the inborn manual predispositions given to the female sex by nature to take better care of home. Those “small talents” translated into “little pieces”. Those pieces could be quite pretty since the experts in female nature attributed the sense of beauty to women – but insufficient to aspire to creating pure, high art being the product of spirit and intellect, filtering reality and distilling it up to the sphere of human ideals – still, they could serve “to beautify living”. Women were reserved the right to beautify themselves (fashion), their surroundings (interior design) and things (handicrafts such as embroidery). That tradition of women doing arts – not fine art but beautifying one – combined with their manual skills contributed to ideas how to take up salaried work. Women with artistic talents offered to paint fans, china, coloured postcards and photos. Naturally, there were some exceptions; in the first half of the 19th century, Henryka Beyer earned her living by easel painting and Emilia Dukszyńska-Dukszta was a popular portrait painter in 1870s. In the last decades of the 19th century, the number of female Poles being professional painters and graduates of artistic schools, grew steadily.

Traditionally, women were also able to use their musical talents and practice such artistic professions as actress, singer or dancer. The scene was a proper place for women in the eyes of public opinion for a long time, however, only for a specific type of women. In their case, the issue of career did not give rise to strong emotions. Female artists were presumed to be immoral and unfit to be wives or mothers; the conflict between their vocation to keep vigil of home hearth and working did not apply to them. First, the acceptance of the aforesaid artistic jobs as capable of being done by women was based on their derivative instead of creative nature. Singers, piano players, actresses etc. performed works of composers and playwrights. Their art was to convey the author’s ideas as best as possible, or of interpretation which did not threaten the position of a man being the creator. Still, certain outstanding artists (like Helena Modrzejewska) enjoyed social recog-

dition and respect thanks to their artistic achievements. But even they sometimes were snubbed socially.

To sum up: the experts in "nature" claimed that women had teaching talents as well as purely manual or artistic talents, but they were denied any intellectual predispositions or scientific talents as the intellect fell into the domain reserved for men.²⁴ Even when the necessity of women's working was acceptable, there were voices, heard often in the press during the second half of the 19th century, that women were unable to practice all professions. People who considered their views as moderate wanted to convince radicals of that truth accusing them of being unpractical and fanatic.²⁵ Nobody questioned the reasonability of paid manual work done by lower-class women as it was the long-established and "normal" element of the reality. The fiercest opposition was against the women's fight to intellectual work as being impossible to be done at home and necessitated higher education; at the same time, it increased the social prestige and position. Such professions were traditionally practiced by men. The conservatives made frantic attempts to uphold the status quo. Any women who aspired to such professions, were accused of being ambitious and adventurous. Typical arguments of those against working women were quoted by Eliza Orzeszkowa in her book entitled *Marta*. In that novel, those viewpoints were uttered by a professional publicist thus reflecting the spirit of hot press polemics during those times, often fuelled by the fear of competition. That publicist-writer believes that, in fact, women do not seek work but want to shine and reach a high rank in the society which, and the same time, might allow them to loosen up the tightly laced corset of morality.²⁶

Apart from raising the appreciation for household chores, those opposing working women also proposed an alternative to emancipation, namely the option to be active in wider social field which allowed stepping outside the family circle for a while but without prejudice to

²⁴ NOWOSIELSKI, p. 217.

²⁵ F.M., p. 37.

²⁶ Reverend Karol Niedziałkowski believed that the main motivation behind the emancipation of women was their ambition and desire for fame. Even at the end of the 19th century he claimed that "the emancipating women are all about being seen and honoured". K. NIEDZIAŁKOWSKI, *Nie tędy droga Szanowne Panie!*, Warszawa 1897, p. 166.

the traditional model of femininity. Proposals for women with cultural or intellectual ambitions who enjoyed the social life, was the so-called “salon” where they were able to show off both looks and intelligence. On the other hand, women sensitive to social problems could take up charity work – it was quite fashionable among high society ladies in the second half of the 19th century to take part in charitable events.²⁷ Nevertheless, both philanthropic efforts or having a “salon” should be a side activity without prejudice to the fundamental role of woman – being wife, mother, mistress of the house. The traditional philanthropy of upper-class ladies generally consisted in participation in money collections, parties, concerts or raffles; any income from such events was designated for charity and to giving alms on particular occasions.²⁸ Positivists thoroughly scorned that type of charitable activity – being a kind of social meetings. They promoted involved charity by facing the problem of poverty directly, or, preferably, preventing poverty.²⁹ In the second half of the 19th century, Polish women were very eager to participate in educational associations which – because of secret teaching of the Polish language and the history of Poland – were additionally patriotic. For many of them, such charitable or social activities actually taught them how to become independent and organised, thus producing the emancipating effect – as was noted by the leader of Polish emancipation of women, Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit.³⁰

Another established model for women’s social activity, the “salon” as a form of both social and intellectual event, was highly respected and popular in the first half of the 19th century. It was a place where women could shine, and the hostess played the first fiddle being a kind of moderator and promoter advertising “geniuses” and

²⁷ The 19th century fashion for charity was addressed by M. PIOTROWSKA-MARCHEWA, *Nędzarze i filantropi. Problem ubóstwa w polskiej opinii publicznej w latach 1815–1863*, Toruń 2004, p. 32; M. PIOTROWSKA, *Działalność filantropijna kobiet polskich w XIX wieku. Kierunki aktywności, motywacje, przykłady*, in: S. KALEMBKA – N. KASPAREK (eds.), *Między irredentą a kolaboracją. Polacy w czas zaborów wobec obcych władz i systemów politycznych*, Olsztyn 2001, pp. 11–20.

²⁸ E. MAZUR, *Działalność dobroczynna kobiet z warszawskich elit społecznych w drugiej połowie XIX wieku. Wariant tradycyjny i nowoczesny*, in: A. ŻARNOWSKA – A. SZWARC (eds.), *Kobieta i kultura życia codziennego. Wiek XIX i XX, Zbiór studiów*, Warszawa 1997, pp. 309–316.

²⁹ Kronika działalności kobiecej, in: *Bluszcz*, 1, 1877/1878, p. 7.

³⁰ P. KUCZALSKA-REINSCHMIT, *E pur si muove*, in: *Przegląd Tygodniowy*, 261, 1893, p. 294.

"talents".³¹ The creation of own salon, for example a literary one, both exclusive and popular at the same time, was the greatest ambition of many society ladies. In the second half of the 19th century, apart from criticising the mock charity, positivists also clashed with the salon arguing that it failed to fulfil any important cultural function.³² For positivists, the "salon-based education" became the synonym of all evil present in the education and bringing up of girls as it allegedly contributed to moulding the type of a shallow woman who only cared for fun, a coquette, promoter of foreign culture (in the case, a French one as the French language dominated in the Polish salons of that time).³³ Despite their derision, they were unable to overthrow the institution of salon entirely and it remain a valid option in the second half of the 19th century for those ladies that had ambition crossing the family threshold.

Also, for female (and male) supporters of emancipation, the argument of the other side concerning the female nature was difficult to overcome as no one could argue with biology and the "God's order"; the supporters of traditional role of women hardly said anything about the "sad economic necessity". Ruined gentry families who had to leave their manors, usually settled in larger cities, mainly in Warsaw. Many women from that social group had to face independence and the problem of getting work and being able to support themselves not for ideas but for purely practical reasons, as stressed the publicists of that time.³⁴ The first trenches of those opposing working women were overcome by the pressure of reasons "coming straight from life". Only extreme hardliner conservatives detached from reality were able to censure poor women who were forced to earn their living. Another step towards the acceptance of women's work was the argument that if they have to work, it should be made possible for them, or even facilitated (among others through education). The

³¹ In the 1840s and 1850s, the very popular literary salon in Warsaw was that of Magdalena Łuszczewska, the mother of Deotyma (Jadwiga Łuszczewska). Mr. Łuszczewski "has always claimed and reiterated that since the home is the sole kingdom of women and the salon is a perfect area for her influence, the Monday meetings were arranged by the mistress of the house". J. ŁUSZCZEWSKA, *Pamiętnik 1834–1897*, Warszawa 1968, p. 49.

³² B. PRUS, *Kroniki*, T. VI, Warszawa 1957, pp. 105–108.

³³ SZWARC, p. 299.

³⁴ Kobieta na polu ekonomii politycznej, in: *Bluszcz*, 1875, p. 270; F.M., p. 37; Kronika naukowego, artystycznego i społecznego ruchu kobiet, in: *Bluszcz*, 3, 1875, p. 23.

voice of Eliza Orzeszkowa in the matter of women's working was released in 1873 and was widely read and commented upon. *Marta* was an involved novel with author's commentaries bringing it closer to publicism. In modern terms, it could be classified as a "book that accuses the society" of denying changes to survive to the main heroine. On the other hand, the heroine herself was completely unprepared to a situation that called for a sudden and complete independence. She was uneducated (despite receiving the standard education provided to high society girls) and had no skills to ensure her ability to survive. "Is it my fault that I cannot do it?" asks Marta. "Why do you expect from me something that I have never been taught?" When she finally has a chance to do work that she can do, she cannot get it solely because she is a woman. *Marta* was a fierce criticism of both the existing model of education for girls and the society's attitude to women who were arbitrarily deprived of the right to work. Orzeszkowa ends her novel dramatically – the young widow, after a long strife for staying afloat, after many fruitless (because of her sex or because she is not skilled – and she is not skilled because of not being taught as a woman) attempts to find a source of honest living, starts to steal and then kills herself. What could be the response of opponents of women's work to such drama? Orzeszkowa claimed that their arguments would begin with negation of the reality. "This is not poverty, Sir; its ambition! Ambition!"³⁵ They refer to old times "our grand-grandmothers" and the obsolete model.³⁶

During the years following the January Uprising, the acceptance of working women by the Polish society was achieved quite rapidly. Still, it mostly concerned single women who were unsupported by husbands and had no family duties. In the public opinion, women who were forced to earn their living although they had no desire to do so, sacrificing themselves for their family (old parents, small children) should not be criticised but sympathized with and even respected. Positivists believed that work was the only right way of living and praised those who, instead of vegetating and being parasites of others, tried to take action. Still, they did not believe that the independence of women was an irreversible process, just the opposite. In 1879,

³⁵ E. ORZESZKOWA, *Marta*, Warszawa 1954, pp. 219–221.

³⁶ Ibidem, p. 221.

Bolesław Prus wrote in *Kurier Warszawski* that if husband's work was sufficient to provide for wife and daughters, ladies would shake off the emancipation fast as "they prefer to dress up and listen to nightingale's song".³⁷ Still, the fears of conservatives were greater, and they were right. Working by women, even if caused by economic factors only, was ultimately conducive to emancipation. As it led to financial independence and self-sufficiency, it became the centre of interest of the emancipists, who considered it as the very core of the emancipation.³⁸

Another argument raised by conservatives, as well as noted by those with "moderate" stance, was the growing competition between women and men on the labour market, thus taking livelihood from "feeders of families".³⁹ Although women's work was seen as inferior to men's work in terms of quality and productivity, it was much cheaper and amounted to real competition in certain areas (for example trade) at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.⁴⁰ Thus, not only conservatives but also those "moderate" did not approve of women who "want although they do not have to" and work "as a whim" although they are not forced to do it for financial reasons; such work was perceived as socially damaging and emancipation whim. Individuals with intellectual ambitions and/or professional aspirations who worked to become independent, were emancipating women who desired to go beyond the traditional restraints placed on women.

The actions of a few but conspicuous emancipating women caused a slow change in mental attitudes of the Polish society. A big role in those transformations was played by a more and more available and popular press. Press polemics addressed actual problems, stances clashed, and new ideas came into life in the newspaper columns. They can serve as a basis for tracking the process of gradual acceptance of new models by the social opinion. And, at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, working by young ladies from averagely affluent families was no longer a peculiarity or shame, was no longer criticised

³⁷ PRUS, p. 189.

³⁸ P. KUCZAŁSKA-REINSCHMIT, E pur si muove, in: *Przegląd Tygodniowy*, 38, 1893, p. 405.

³⁹ Kronika naukowego, artystycznego i społecznego ruchu kobiet, in: *Bluszcz*, 3, 1875, p. 23.

⁴⁰ A. JANIĄK-JASIŃSKA, Pracownice i pracownicy handlu na rynku pracy w Królestwie Polskim przełomu XIX i XX wieku, in: A. ŻARNOWSKA – A. SZWARC (eds.), *Kobieta i praca. Wiek XIX i XX. Zbiór studiów*, Warszawa 2000, pp. 77–102.

– but only until marriage. Even in the first half of the 20th century, the public opinion bristled at the notion of working by married women who were sufficiently supported by husbands; attempts were made to counteract that trend. According to those against, it was harmful to home, husband and children and, what is more, jobs were taken away from men. For that reason, in the 1930s, during the times of economic crisis in Poland, married women were sacked from offices.⁴¹

⁴¹ J. ŻARNOWSKI, Praca zawodowa kobiet w Polsce międzywojennej, A. ŻARNOWSKA – A. SZWARC (eds.), *Kobieta i praca. Wiek XIX i XX. Zbiór studiów*, Warszawa 2000, p. 121.